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ABSTRACT

This outline, which briefly describes the American system of education with major emphasis on professional library education, was designed for the foreign student interested in pursuing a graduate degree in library science. Specific topics include the A.L.A. accreditation system for library schools, the semester system, application and admission procedures, and scholarships and fellowships that are available from library schools. (AP)

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NOTES ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

American Library Association

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NOTES ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

The structure of the American system of education differs from that of many countries. These notes are prepared to answer questions which foreign students may have on library education in the United States.

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

There is no national ministry of education in the U.S. with control of schools and education. Education is the responsibility of the individual states and local governments and, therefore, systems of school organization vary somewhat from state to state. They may also vary to some extent within an individual state. This paper describes a general pattern of education, and it groups schools under two headings: (1) elementary and secondary schools, and (2) institutions of higher education.

(1) The elementary and secondary schooling of a child usually extends over a total of approximately twelve years. The elementary school includes what is called primary school in some countries and usually is organized into six or eight grades of one year each. Children enter the first grade of elementary school at the age of six years. Upon completion of elementary school the student enters secondary school (sometimes called "high school"). Upon satisfactory completion of the twelfth grade of secondary school (usually at the age of eighteen) the student is granted a diploma and is then eligible to enroll in an institution of higher education. Approximately 80% of American young people complete secondary school.

(2) Higher education includes all schooling beyond secondary school. Institutions of academic higher education include colleges and universities. Colleges and universities grant degrees and for the most part they are completely autonomous. Each of the states operates at least one university and several colleges. In addition to the state-operated institutions, there are many privately-supported institutions of higher education.

Although in popular usage, the term "college" is often used loosely to refer to any institution of higher learning, in this paper we will use the term in its precise academic meaning as follows:

The college is an institution which offers a 4 year program of study in the liberal arts and sciences, and which grants a bachelor's degree. The university is an institution which may include several colleges and professional schools, and offers programs leading to advanced degrees as well as the bachelor's degree.

In a liberal arts college, whether it is an independent institution or part of a university, the first 2 years of study are devoted to general study in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences. This is required of all students. Specialization begins with the third college year, when the student may begin to choose courses (electives) in line with individual subject interests.

Normally the student takes several courses in one field, and this field of concentration is called the major. Some institutions require a minor concentration in a related field but broad, general education is the primary goal of students in college.

The first degree earned at a 4 year college, whether it is an independent institution or part of a university, is called the bachelor's (or baccalaureate) degree. It is usually a B.A. (bachelor of arts) or B.S. (bachelor of science). The period of study for this degree (between completion of high school and the receipt of the baccalaureate degree) is known as undergraduate study. Study beyond the baccalaureate degree in the United States is called graduate study (in many other countries this is known as postgraduate study).

Advanced degrees, awarded after successful completion of programs of graduate study, include the master's degree and the doctor's degree (or doctorate). Typical advanced degrees are the master of arts (M.A.), the master of science (M.S.), and the doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.). Programs leading to the master's degree usually require at least one year of study beyond the baccalaureate degree, and may require the writing of a thesis. The doctorate requires at least two years of study beyond the master's degree as well as the completion of a dissertation and written and oral examinations.

Education for the professions, including librarianship, is largely a university responsibility. Typically it is pursued at the graduate level. Although universities are free to design the types of programs of professional education they think desirable, standards for professional study are set by professional associations and societies.

ACCREDITATION — Voluntary accreditation is the device which serves in the United States to identify institutions of higher education whose general and professional education programs meet basic standards of quality. Voluntary accreditation is unique to American schools and colleges, which are not under the control of a central ministry of education. Accreditation is of two types: (1) Institutional accreditation by regional accrediting associations, signifying that the college or university as a whole meets its educational objectives satisfactorily; and (2) Program accreditation by national professional associations, signifying that a program of education for a particular profession meets that profession's standards. Normally only programs of study leading to the first professional degree are subject to accreditation.

In the field of librarianship the American Library Association (ALA) is authorized to accredit graduate programs of library education leading to the master's degree. The ALA does not itself offer courses or examinations, but it has established standards for programs of professional library education. Programs that satisfactorily meet those standards can be accredited. In October 1976 there were 58 U.S. schools and 6 Canadian schools offering programs accredited by the ALA.

A list of accredited graduate library school programs is issued semi-annually by the Committee on Accreditation of the American Library Association and is available upon request.

ACCREDITED LIBRARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Library Schools in the U.S. and Canada offering ALA-accredited programs are usually part of a university and are established at the graduate level. They generally require for admission (1) a baccalaureate degree, (2) a superior academic record, (3) fluency in English, and (4) competency in one or two modern foreign languages. Some schools require candidates for admission to take entrance examinations. Each school sets its own specific admission requirements. These are stated in the catalog of the school which is a prospectus with complete information on admission requirements, programs of study, courses taught, and other details. Applicants should study the catalog thoroughly. Catalogs are available upon request from each library school. A brief listing of requirements for admission to each of the ALA accredited schools is available from the Library Education Division, ALA, 50 E. Huron, Chicago, Ill. 60611.

There are three basic elements in the library school program: (1) a series of introductory or core courses which deal with the underlying principles, processes, materials, and techniques of librarianship; (2) specialized courses within one of the areas of librarianship (such as school, public, academic, or special libraries, or cataloging, reference, administration, etc.); and often (3) related courses outside the library school, such as chemical bibliography for the chemical librarian, curriculum development for the school librarian, etc.

All students who expect to earn a degree are expected to take a specific number of courses. The core courses are required. In addition the student chooses (or elects) a certain number of the specialized courses. In order to provide a choice of such elective courses the library school will offer more courses than any one student is expected to take. For instance, while one school lists 38 courses to be offered during the academic year, that school only requires each student to take 7 of the prescribed core courses, and expects him or her to elect 8 additional courses. The variety of course offerings makes possible the specialized study in different fields referred to in (2) "specialized courses..." above.

The length of the program of study varies among the several schools, depending upon the specific requirements of each school. In general it may be said that it will require an absolute minimum of one full year (11 months) after graduation from a four year college. This is definitely a minimum, particularly for the student from another country who may be required to make up deficiencies in educational background before entering the degree program. Students for whom English is a second language may also need to allow extra time to complete the program because of language difficulties. They find it advisable to take a reduced number of courses at the beginning of the program. Some schools require the student to write a thesis or a major paper before the degree is granted, and this often takes additional time after completion of the course work.

All ALA-accredited library school programs in the U.S. give a master's degree upon successful completion of the basic program. The degree is variously named, depending upon the school and the particular program elected by the student but it is usually an M.A., M.S., or M.L.S.

The listing of ALA accredited graduate library school programs mentioned previously also indicates which of these schools offer programs for a doctoral degree. Additional information on doctoral programs in library and information science is available from the Library Education Division of ALA.

Several library schools in the United States are introducing programs beyond the master's degree (sometimes referred to as post-Master's specialist or certificate programs) which are meant for advanced study but do not lead to the Ph.D. These "sixth-year" programs are valuable for the continuing education of the librarian and make possible advanced study on new aspects of librarianship or intensive specialization in particular subject areas. If a foreign student has had basic library education and experience in his or her own country, such programs might be useful, but it should be recognized that they do not lead to a traditional academic degree.

LIBRARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS NOT ACCREDITED BY THE ALA

In addition to the library school programs accredited by the ALA, there are well over 500 colleges and unviersities in the U.S. offering library science courses on the graduate or undergraduate level. These programs vary in quality from excellent to very weak. Since the ALA accredits only programs on the graduate level there is no single listing which can serve as an evaluative guide to undergraduate programs.

Correspondence courses are offered by a number of schools but they are not accepted by the accredited library schools for credit toward a degree. In general such courses are planned to assist persons employed in positions of limited responsibility and would have little value for foreign librarians.

Prospective students should be aware that there are also many junior colleges (frequently called community colleges) in the U.S. These are schools with two-year programs of general education, similar to that offered in a liberal arts college, or of technical-vocational training. Some junior colleges offer programs to train library technical assistants. These programs should not be confused with programs of professional education for librarianship. Library technical assistants are non-professional employees who perform certain kinds of library tasks under the supervision of a professional librarian.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

The academic year in most universities begins in September or early October. This academic year is divided in one of three ways. Under the semester system it is divided into two segments (of roughly 18 weeks) called semesters. Under this system there is often a summer session (of 6 to 9 weeks) in which fewer courses are taken and in which course work is presented more intensively.

Under the trimester system the year is divided into three equal segments (of roughly 15 weeks) called trimesters. An academic year is composed of three trimesters and there is a summer vacation of approximately one month.

Under the quarter system, the academic year is divided into three segments (of roughly 11 to 12 weeks) called quarters. In these schools there is a fourth or summer quarter of equal length for students who wish to continue their studies straight through the year.

Application and admission. Some schools require or prefer that new students begin their work in the summer or fall terms. Students who wish to begin their studies in September are expected by most schools to file their application for admission at least six months in advance. The catalog of the library school should be consulted for information about application deadlines. Admission may be conditional, requiring completion of certain undergraduate courses, the making up deficiencies, or the successful completion of an English examination. Once a student has been accepted for admission to a library school, notification should be sent to all other schools to which an application has been made stating the individual is no longer a candidate for admission.

Expenses. The cost of a year's study will vary significantly from school to school, depending upon such variables as tuition, other school expenses, and the cost of living. Living and study expenses may range from $3,000 to $6,000 or more, not including the cost of round trip transportation from the student's home country. Expenses show a wide range from school to school; therefore, current information should be obtained from the individual library schools.

Since difficulties often arise in the transfer of funds from other countries to the U.S., every student should make definite and reliable arrangements to have necessary funds on hand at the beginning of each semester and at regular intervals throughout the stay in this country. Most universities require a student to pay the expenses for a full semester before or at the time of registration.

Scholarships, fellowships. All library schools offering accredited programs have some funds for scholarship and fellowship assistance, and students from other countries are eligible to apply. In all cases, however, there are many more requests for assistance than there is money available, and competition is keen. Only the best qualified students, from the U.S. or elsewhere, can expect financial assistance from this source. There is no central clearinghouse for requests for financial assistance. Applications for scholarships or other aid from a library school should be made at the same time a foreign student applies for admission to study. Applications for scholarship aid usually must be filed in February if they are to be approved in time for a student to receive such aid when studies are started the following September.

There are many sources of scholarship aid in addition to those administered by the library schools. Information on many of these is found in Handbook on International Study (see below). The Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in one's country, or the USIS library if there is one, have information on scholarship programs and other opportunities sponsored by the U.S. Government and private organizations. Financial Assistance for Library Education is an annual listing of sources from the Library Education Division.

Work-study programs are available in some universities but these usually are impractical for foreign students. Work responsibilities may take time which the foreign student needs for study. Many jobs require a fluency in English and American expressions that can be acquired only with considerable residence in the U.S. Visa requirements are very specific in their regularions on employment, and employment cannot be expected without first obtaining written permission from the U.S. Government. Passport and visa requirements should be investigated at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate at the earliest possible date.

American university libraries usually have an ample number of applications from people who read and speak foreign languages and it is therefore a very unusual situation in which a library school student can expect to be hired primarily because of the ability to work with library materials in his or her own language.

Further information may be found in publications in USIS libraries. These three publications are particularly important:

Handbook on International Study: For Foreign Nationals. 5th edition. Institute of International Education, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017. 1971. $7.00

Meet the USA: Handbook for Foreign Students in the United States. 6th edition. Institute of International Education, 1970. $3.50.

Study Abroad: International Scholarships, International Courses. 20th edition. Paris, Unesco, 1975. $7.50.

ALA International Relations Office
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